2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

the servants, as though listening to the mask and translating its wishes, would order the drummers to change the rhythm; or the mask, silent until then, would stop and talk some gibberish in a falsetto voice, which meant another 'message' or salute, duly translated by the interpreters. Or finally, the mask would set out on a sudden excursion, breaking through the circle, run down a side-street and temporarily disappear.

The mood of the gathering grew more and more excited until, about noon, just when it seemed that the excitement would reach fever pitch, there was a sudden hush. The drumming paused, as did the dancing and singing. The mask stood still, flanked by the 'servants', and a number of old women walked up to it and, on their knees, with bent head, saluted the mask. They handed small gifts of money to the 'servants', which were meant to buy the 'protection of the *ndakó gboyá*'. (This, I was told, was only a token payment: formerly heavy sums were paid in the same fashion.) Soon afterwards the mask disappeared, now without returning, and the pause turned into a midday break, when everyone went home. At about 3 o'clock the mask reappeared on the market place, which soon filled with people, and the proceedings of the morning were resumed. The drumming and dancing went on into the night, to the light of torches and hurricane lamps, uninterrupted even by a gathering thunderstorm. At about 9 o'clock the mask danced out of the circle and disappeared in the dark, not to return. 'You see', a bystander pointed out, 'how it is swallowed up by the ground'.

The crowd of onlookers included not only every soul in Kutigi, among them all the local notables and the Fulani District Head (a 'royal prince' from Bida), the contingent from Shebe, but also many strangers who had learned of the forthcoming performance. The attitude of the crowd was an odd mixture of enjoyment and fear. Of the former there could be no doubt; for a long time afterwards people were talking about the 'nice' and 'beautiful' performance as though they were commenting on an ordinary festivity, and the 'servants' of the mask several times pressed me to say whether the '*ndakó gboyá* had pleased me'. But there was no question either of the fear. It was clearly voiced already in the women's songs; for unlike many ceremonial songs of Nupe, those sung at the *ndakó gboyá* are far from nondescript or ambiguous.

(1)

One does not call him friend
When he comes to stay in the bush:
A friend (he) is when he leaves.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

(2)

794 We are saying—'A stranger has come (in the night)'
539 He is greater than the chief.
We are saying—'being greater than the chief,
781 May he go away when day comes.'

(3)

We are desiring the cloth (mask)
Which covers the Great One.
God is in front,
He is in the back (i.e. being everywhere and all-powerful, God will protect us).

794 The attitude towards the *ndakó gboyá* could not be better
781 expressed: he is a 'friend' only when he leaves, a powerful 'stranger' whom one wishes to see gone; and while one must invoke the secret of the 'cloth', it is yet so terrifying that the thought of God alone gives comfort. But let me stress that this is not merely the unthinking expression of conventional sentiments; the fear and awe referred to in the songs were clearly visible even in this ceremonial, devoid though it was of the more sinister implications of witch-hunting and punishment. When the old women presented their gifts of a few pennies to the mask, they were acting genuinely and in all humbleness; and any person whom the mask approached, man or woman, was as genuinely terrified. Men whom I knew to be sophisticated and 'enlightened', such as the local dispenser and one of my servants, ran and hid behind a hedge when the mask suddenly towered over them.

794 Nor can there be any doubt but that the people believe in the magic effects of the ceremonial. Even after the mild version I happened to see I heard the remark that the village was now clear of witchcraft. This attitude does not really conflict with the well-known extortions practised by the *ndakó gboyá* society; the admission of the abuses is one thing, and the belief in the anti-witchcraft cult quite another. Thus the Government's ban of the *ndakó gboyá* was thought regrettable if indeed not disastrous; everywhere the people spoke with envy of their cousins in Patigi who had kept their *ndakó gboyá* and hence preserved 'the only sure protection against witchcraft'. Often have I been told that in the rest of Nupe there was now no means of fighting witches, and no protection 'save God', who, as we know, is inscrutable, idle, 'far away'.

To be sure, even the *ndakó gboyá* is not a full protection. Though it may frighten witches and temporarily 'cleanse' a community, it cannot exterminate witchcraft. For not only must the cere-

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

about female witches and to the vicarious satisfaction of witch-hunting. Nupe religion, we must conclude, cannot hold its own as a messenger of ideals.

4. ASSURANCE AND STIMULATION

We have already mentioned the circular efficacy linking these two components of religious experience. Yet they can be separated in analysis, as much (or as little) as the mere knowing and learning of religious truths can be held apart from the actual living through acts of devotion.

Concerning the assurances about the world and man's place in it which can be known and learned, there is little to say, and most that can be said is negative. Nupe doctrine does not teach that the universe is benevolent or that the deity is closely concerned with human fate. Though man has skills and ritual procedures to invoke supernatural aid, their outcome will often remain uncertain. Thus these skills and procedures contain only traces of the calculable forcefulness of 'magic'. The strictly technical manipulations of *cigbe* come closest to this conception; yet they, too, are subject to the will of God, or accident, and even the miraculous medicines in which one places absolute confidence involve 'invocations' (not 'spells') and hence an element of submission. In the last resort, man can only appeal and supplicate; if, on balance, Nupe religion is optimistic, this only means that it holds out hopes in the face of a world governed by accident, not that there is an assured or reassuring design behind it.

To turn to the 'stimulations'. We need not stress again that the self-abandonment of the mystic or visionary is utterly foreign to the Nupe. Never does the worshipper face his god in solitude, drawing only upon his inward experience or seeking private illumination. Nor is the mood he seeks in his worship entirely religious, that is, unattainable save through the 'thought of supernatural relations'; for in all the major rites at least, that mood emerges also from the added stimuli of music, dancing, crowd behaviour, and perhaps sexual excitement. Generally, the mood of Nupe worship is restrained and calm, leading to no extremes either of fear and stress or of exultation. The absence of elaborate ritualism precludes the tensions that go with rigidly prescribed gestures or speech; in avoiding nocturnal performances most rituals also avoid the sharp accents of fear and mystery; and the rules of ritual etiquette usually curb abandoned behaviour.

Above all, the mood of Nupe worship lacks development. The ritual prepares and holds a sense of the sacred in various, familiar ways—through rules marking off the ritual occasion from ordinary

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

ones; through the subdued, solemn manner of applying oneself to the ritual task; and through the serious import of the supplication. But this mood is merely 'lived through'; it involves no mounting expectancy, pressing for some culminating experience or final fulfilment. In the act of worship proper, embodied in the esoteric phase of any rite, the prayer or the sacrificial meal might play that part. Intellectually, the prayer represents the crucial moment, when the whole purpose of the ritual is made clear and the appeal or hope articulately expressed. In the large-scale ceremonials, too, there is some emotional preparation for that moment, drumming and singing being abruptly silenced when the prayer is about to be uttered. Yet it is uttered too early in the proceedings and uttered too informally to come as a culminating stage. The sacrificial meal stands out in that it concludes the act of worship proper; but just then the solemn mood is also visibly fading.

The movable rites and minor observances; consisting as they do only of prayer and sacrifice, do not progress beyond that short-lived 'sensing of the sacred'. And if the great ceremonials offer further excitements and something akin to a final climax, these no longer grow out of the awareness of transcendental events, but are achieved through the massed stimuli of more common appeal —music, dancing, and so forth. As I suggested in an earlier context, some anticipation of the final stimulations must fuse with the mood of the worship proper; as the congregation in turn retains some sense of the sacred even in the phase of the 'merry-making', though in the absence of elaborate symbols acting as 'reminders' that sense is none too secure. What is important is that the worship as such does not work up to any final 'fulfilment'; rather, the emotional tensions remain diffuse and without climax. They only sensitize the congregation to the 'annunciations and promises' voiced in the ritual but do not prepare the worshippers for revelations.

The bush vigil in the *gunnu* may seem an exception since here certain pronouncements are made to a congregation previously exposed to fear and the thrills of mystery. But again, this is not a true climax of religious experience; this episode is only a prelude to the actual rite (and can in fact be omitted); while the pronouncement is concerned with nothing more momentous than an admonishment of adolescents. Indeed, the very mood of fear and mystery, which would seem so congenial to the expectancy of revelations, must be called exceptional. One other ritual, the *mamma*, is staged in a similar atmosphere; but it occurs only in a few communities and is performed with little excitement or awe; nor does it carry any message or 'annunciation'.

Another exception is more important. In each Nupe community the calm and restrained mood of worship is reversed once, in the

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

abandoned excitement of one or the other of the three ceremonials *gunnu*, *gani* and *navũ*. This break in the 'ethos' of Nupe religion carries its own explanation; for it is understood as a licence, setting aside normally valid and precisely named controls—of sex and of physical violence against political opponents. Here, then, impulses repressed in secular life are compensated, and tensions generated through the repression, offered explosive, or 'cathartic', release. Religion, in providing these outlets (on circumscribed occasions), anticipates as well as canalizes the working of psychological mechanisms, which might otherwise operate in random fashion or beyond the control of the society, in the 'private worlds' of neuroses and psychopathic fantasies.[1]

Probably no society is free from some such repressions. In Nupe, they are clearly traceable. The 'ethos' of Nupe life is again generally calm and restrained; but in some measure it is only meant to appear so. That it also conceals deep anxieties and tensions is shown by the witchcraft fantasies, which belie the acquiescence so often typical of the overt relationship between the sexes. And in one sphere of social life, in political ambition, passions and anxieties come to the surface. Consider, however, that this intense political rivalry is itself an instance of 'constraint', imposed as it is by the rigid class society. Indeed, it is doubly 'constrained'; for the passions here aroused are not permitted free play, as they might in some kind of jungle ethics, but are hemmed in by an intricate code of etiquette imposing semblance of gentility and acquiescence. We must conclude, then, that the uneven mood of Nupe religion indicates an 'ethos' kept calm and unexcited through those circumscribed chances of unrestraint. In other words, while certain facts of worship express the calmness meant to govern mundane life, others make it possible, through absorbing its disturbances into their own explosive mood. As we know, the balance is imperfect; there are the sudden outbursts of political passion when pent-up tensions find 'random' relief, as well as escapes into neurosis. Let us note a further point. One familiar 'compensation', in the form of fantasies about a golden age or a promised millennium, is entirely absent in Nupe religion. The Nupe attempt to resolve the 'uneasiness' of reality not in ideological fashion but, as I put it before, by the 'sheer dynamics' of repressions lifted and emotional tensions relieved.

Here we are already touching upon the fusion of 'assurance' and 'stimulation'. It occurs, briefly, when 'living through' the acts of worship leaves some lasting effect upon the individual's attitude towards the world around him: the cathartic relief of the few hectic rituals implies precisely this. Yet the effect is diffuse and in

[1] See my *Foundations*, p. 356.

2: Nadel E.5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

We cannot precisely measure this psychological aftermath of acts of worship. But we can assess it indirectly, from the concern with religious experiences visible in everyday life. And here it is quite clear that our second assumption is the correct one. For the acts of worship do not leave any vivid awareness of the achieved communion with the deity nor any lasting sense of the holy. There is nothing of 'religiosity' in the Nupe character. He knows, of course, at all times, that there is a God and a realm of the supernatural; but ordinarily this is tacit knowledge, of no practical relevance, neither permanently awe-inspiring nor permanently exhilarating. Crudely speaking, the Nupe are religious only on religious occasions; in between, life is an affair of secular values and rules-of-thumb. That even sacred places are 'sacred' only at certain times of the year is part of the same attitude; so is the absence of any conception of personal holiness. Even Islam, with its daily prayers, its Friday service, and its pious scholars, has hardly affected this attitude. For the daily prayers have become unthinking routine, without any touch of the mystic; being a mallam is a profession among others and often combined with them; and the Moslem cult of saints or 'holy men' found no response.

All this means that the spheres of religion and the profane remain clearly separable. Probably few religions merge completely with secular life so that every possible action bears some reference to transcendental notions. Nor, of course, can we conceive of religions which would at no point coincide with mundane interests. But the border zone between the two can be more or less wide and more or less sharply circumscribed. In Nupe, this zone is narrow and sharply outlined. Wherever the 'competences' of religion bear on mundane interests we can readily mark the point where the coincidence ceases. There is no 'carry-over' from one to the other. Thus religion sustains the offices of chiefs, kings, and other exponents of authority and law: but their person is not sacred, and criminals convicted by these holders of supernaturally sanctioned offices are not treated with any show of awe or sacred horror. Religion helps to bind together the kin group through the belief in reincarnation, through ancestral sacrifices, and through the solemnization of marriage and birth: but the Nupe do not, on normal occasions, speak the names of the ancestors with bated breath or constantly worry about placating their spirits. Marriage is in no sense sacred, and children are not holy; even children whose birth is ascribed to the efficacy of sacrifice are not treated in any special way.[1] Nor, finally, are the sick who recover with supernatural aid or the crops that thrive after some rite has been duly

[1] The only rules of this kind are entailed in the *sogba* cult, of alien origin.